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de Boer, T.

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SUMMARY

This study deals with the person and writings of Rubem Alves (1933) and seeks specifically to delineate and define the theological notions that emerged from Alves' thinking during his passage from theologian of liberation to theologian of ordinary, everyday life. The hypothesis of this study is that in taking leave of a more traditional (academic) theology Alves provided the foundation and key structural supports for a Latin American and Western theology of quotidian life (*teologia do cotidiano*).

Rubem Alves is a Brazilian Protestant liberation theologian. These qualifications, Brazilian, Protestant, and liberation theologian, are not necessarily coordinate, and not all commentators are agreed on the matter of their possible interaction. However that may be, these modifiers and their interrelationship do summarize Alves' self image. Rubem Alves is Brazilian and Protestant, by birth at least.

He is Protestant by conviction as well, and he presents himself as a theologian by profession. Some do not consider him sufficiently Brazilian, others deem him wanting as liberation theologian, and still others think he is no longer a theologian at all. Alves considers himself to be a liberation theologian, albeit a heterodox one, the same qualification he applies later to his psychoanalytical practice. Educated as a theologian, trained as a psychoanalyst, he has worked first and foremost as a philosopher for the greatest part of his professional life. He was a professor at Campinas University. He became well-known and widely read as a columnist, a publicist, a writer of children's stories and liturgical texts, and polemicist in discussions regarding access to and quality of education.

Chapter I consists of an introduction to Alves' life and work and the political and ecclesiastical context of his theology. It begins with a description of the context of Brazil, in which specific attention is given to the period of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), a period which more or less coincides with Alves' professional life. In the history of modern Brazil there are various constants to be distinguished which determined social relations and perhaps continue to do so. One of these is the contrast between poor and rich. The income disparity in Brazil is one of the most significant of the world's industrialized countries. Geographically there is a great contrast between the prosperous South and the impoverished North, which nevertheless continues to exercise a great deal of political influence. Domestic migration goes hand in hand with this latter disparity, as Alves' family history shows.

The history of Brazil is a history of revolutions: that against the monarchy, that involving the struggle for power between the federal states, that of the military coup. One of those who played a principal part in that history was Getúlio Vargas, leader of the 1930 revolution, architect of the New State and hence precursor of both the rapid social changes that took place in the period from 1956 to 1965 and the military coup of 1964. In addition to the history of conflicts between president and parliament, between federal states and national politicians, there is also that of conflicts with respect to the relation between church and state.

Emperor Pedro II and presidents Vargas and Dutra played a leading role in this history, the emperor particularly in the process of separation of church and state. Vargas played the opposite role by promulgating a constitution by which the Roman Catholic Church regained its special status and privileges. In the period of redemocratization under Dutra the constitution was revised, whereby church and state were once again separated. The separation of church and state in fact meant the recognition of religious minorities such as those of Protestant conviction. Whatever else it may have resulted in, that recognition laid the foundation for the emergence of a colourful array of ecclesiastical entities ranging from megachurches to ultra-small denominations.

Alves' frame of reference is that of the *Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil*, a denomination that initially served as a model of ecumenical openness within and outside of Brazil, but afterwards played a leading role in the application of the mechanisms of dictatorial oppression.

Alves' theological education was influenced by both the person and the teaching of Richard Shaull, the North American theologian of revolution who worked within an ecclesiastical climate of renovation. During the years of his pastorate Alves was actively involved in the (international) Christian student movement and the organization of and participation in national and continental interdenominational conferences. More specifically, Alves' theological-ecclesial perspective and stance were influenced by the new ways of thinking and speaking about God and the community of believers within ISAL (*Igreja e Sociedade em América Latina*, Church and Society in Latin America), which as an institutionalized platform of the ecumenical movement played an important role in Latin America in the sixties and seventies and in which Alves was involved from the very beginning.

It is against that background that Alves wrote his Master of Divinity thesis, *A Theological Interpretation of the Meaning of Revolution in Brazil*, which focuses on the revolutionary situation of Brazil during the presidency of Goulart (1961-1964).

For Alves the coup d'état of March 31 1964 constitutes not only the beginning of a period of political insecurity, but also of personal alienation from the church and theology. The Brazilian dictatorship resulted in oppression and exile for its critics and sharpened the divisions and conflict within and among churches and between church organizations and the government. As a consequence the history of the Brazilian ecumenical movement turned out to be a history of opposition against the military regime, in which Alves became very personally involved. It is unmistakably clear that the course of Alves' life and his theological development have been closely bound up with the history of Brazil, the Brazilian churches and church-related initiatives.

The introductory paragraphs dealing with the general political context of Brazil and that of Brazilian Protestantism and the ecumenical movement are followed by an account of Alves' more personal and theological biography. In Alves' own words this biography can be represented as the sum of four metamorphoses related to three important turning-points in his life: 1953 (theological studies), 1964 (exile), and 1974 (professorate).

The second chapter consists of a description of Alves' theological development. This development is divided into three periods and elucidated by means of a number of themes and keywords. The first period, from 1961 to 1974, covers Alves' biography

proper; the second, from 1974 to 1990, and third, from 1990 on, are related to Alves most important publications and are thus more thematic in nature.

Repeatedly Alves indicates that the central theme of his writings is incarnation, the body, human life. The keyword of this incarnation theology and also of the more scholarly studies Alves devotes to (the sociology, psychology and philosophy of) religion is 'hope.'

All other keywords: development, imagination and play, nostalgia and yearning, poetics and prophecy, are variations on that one keyword of hope. Doing theology, Alves says, is making decisions as to the battlefronts where the struggle must be fought, battlefronts that add up to one extended front as broad as life itself. Alves states that his first book already contains all the themes which are important to him; everything that follows is a variation on one central theme: life that is worthwhile.

Central in the first period is Alves' doctoral thesis and first book *A Theology of Human Hope*. This was the book by which he became known and which established him as a Protestant Brazilian liberation theologian.

Stimulated by the theology of revolution and the changes in stance and perspective of the various churches and faith communities, Alves elaborated his theology of hope as a distinctive Latin American answer to the theological challenge of the sixties of the twentieth century by specifically addressing the big political issues of that period: development-underdevelopment, oppression-liberation. He crystallized the key concept 'hope' in his reflections on the community of believers and the Kingdom of God.

Alves views *A Theology of Human Hope* not only as the completion of his theological studies and ecclesiastical career, but also as the theological foundation for the community of hope which is the community of the Holy Spirit. His intention was to write an introduction to ecclesiology as an expression of his participation in a community of Christians which takes great pains to discover how it can be faithful to its language of faith while working for the liberation of people.

In his dissertation Alves stressed that the Christian faith community whose *ultimate concern* is the liberation of people must develop a new and appropriate language, thereby distinguishing itself from those with other views and at the same time allying itself with the like-minded. Alves calls this new language of the faith community, which he previously termed the language of radical utopism, the language of messianic humanism.

A great part of the first period, which started as a quest for new theological content, was coloured by the painful experiences of his exile. Alves' second book, *Tomorrows' Child*, is an analysis of what he calls the frustrated generation, to which he himself belonged. It too treats of the community of believers as community of hope, the vehicle of the future already come, the community of faith which points the way to the future, to liberation from exile, to the power of imagination.

During the second period, dating from the time of Alves' definitive return to Brazil until his academic appointment in 1974, the emphasis fell on work in the area of religious studies such as sociology of religion. His theological work took on a more meditative and poetic character. The Edward Cadbury lectures in 1990 marked the

transition to a period of prolific writing during which Alves produced publications in a variety of areas. In contrast to the way of thinking characteristic of liberation theology, which he associates with the heat of the day, Alves relates his later mode of reflection to the twilight hours, the particular time when people muse about the things of the day nearly gone.

In his publications from this period Alves keeps coming back to his personal development as theologian, to his personal vision of what theology is or should be. One can see a clear line in his work leading from a theology of development to a theology of twilight or of the everyday, a theology which views life more as gift than task, more as source of enjoyment than struggle. For Alves theology is or ought to be the expression of what motivates people most deeply, and should contribute to the creation of a world shot through with humanity, a world of love. To that end we must outgrow ourselves, rise above our own biography. Theology, Alves says, is an effort to overcome biography by means of history, by engaging as broadly as possible in dialogue with 'relevant others.'

In close connection with the biographical outline in the first chapter and the thematic survey of Alves' most important publications in chapter II, the third chapter deals with the background and topicality of the themes Alves considers to be constants in his work. These themes, which in the end cohere in the central theme of the incarnation, are examined in their relation to the theologies of revolution, hope and liberation respectively. Alves evolved his theology in dialogue with the ecclesiastical, theological and social developments that took place in his direct context and time, beginning with the church and faith environment in which he grew up. The first paragraph of chapter III concerns itself with Alves' Protestant context and the fundamental role the North American theologian Richard Shaull played in it. Shaull's theology of revolution is also a theology of the community of believers, which offered Alves the possibility of elaborating his view of the church as 'church in dispersion,' an ecclesiology that transcends the traditional limits of church and denomination. Alves called his dissertation, *A Theology of Human Hope*, a meditation on the possibility of liberation and a foundation for hope, thereby relating it specifically and materially to the theology of hope and the theology of liberation. Paragraph 2 shows how Alves developed his theology in debate with Jürgen Moltmann and the wider framework of the Latin American theological reflection on the relation between church and world. In paragraph 3 the question is posed whether and, if so, in what sense Alves' theology can be viewed as a theology of liberation. Paragraph 4 describes the way in which Alves brings the notions of hope and liberation together in the theme of incarnation. It is clear that his personal faith, experience and longing form the undergirding of and the stimulus for the elaboration of a quotidian theology, a theology of the everyday.

Chapter IV deals with Alves' view of everyday life as a metaphor and as the concrete reality in which people experience God and speak about God. For Alves the most important value on earth is life itself, not life in an abstract sense, but in a tangible bodily sense, life in all its fullness. That is why the pursuit of life—the establishment of a world filled with the substance and quality of humanity, the promotion of openness to encounter with others and with God—can be the only orientation and aim of hope and liberation. Alves connects incarnation with the desire of God to become human and with the longing of people for God. For this reason Alves sought to locate the point of

departure for his theology closer to himself, to the concrete reality of people's existence, to everyday life. And it is on that account, too, that Alves views poetic language—the speech that expresses the inexpressible and names the unnameable—to be preeminently suited for articulating, relating and sharing personal experiences of faith.

The second paragraph of chapter IV offers an explication of the contrast between theology as poetic idiom and as scholarly language. The third paragraph deals with the concept of everyday life as metaphor and as concrete reality in which people experience and speak about God.

In chapter V Alves' development is summarized in the form of three points.

1. Alves' theology of quotidian life stands in opposition to the academic professionalization and ideologization of theology, such as that of the theology of liberation advanced in recent decades in Latin America. During the various phases of the history of the development of liberation theology Alves broke and continues to break through the walls of the academy and the boundaries of his own circles to bring up new themes for theological reflection. The matters that Alves described and held up as *theological* themes—liberation and hope, nostalgia and longing, the religious experience of people in their daily environment and life— have become recognized as such in a much wider context than that of liberation theology alone. Alves' point of reference in everyday life, it may be argued, constitutes a means for overcoming the double, ecclesiastical and social 'orphaning' of theology, by providing it with a new anchorage. In essence Alves' theology is a theology of recontextualization, of renewed appropriation

2. Alves' theology of quotidian life brings the Biblical wisdom literature (Song of Songs, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) to mind against the background of Lamentations, the Psalms and the Prophets. Both his poetic language and his concrete, practical, nearly daily commentary on the weal and woe of his environment remind one of the author of Proverbs. Alves' theology of the everyday is, thus, a theology of the 'small liberation' (Leonardo Boff) which calls for consideration and appreciation of the vigor and beauty of day-to-day life without losing sight of socio-economic reality. Alves' concept of theology represents a first step toward a real encounter with poets, novelists, composers, with culture, thus, and with Latin American culture in particular,

Finally, Alves' theology of quotidian life offers the opportunity to meet Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Bert Schuurman). Alves did not want to develop a systematic theology. On the contrary, his theology is fragmentary in nature, built around a number of themes; it is associative, intuitive, poetic, unbound, but always rooted in experiences of everyday life.

Alves' emphasis on the body as interpretative theological tool for understanding the life of human beings everywhere, makes it possible to break through the limits of historically and culturally determined Christologies. For Alves Christology is anthropology and conversely anthropology is Christology. Alves' theology of everyday life contains fragments which could be used to formulate a Christology that gives full expression to God's liberating presence in the life of ordinary people.

Thus, Alves brings the particularity of Jesus' physicality into closer relationship with the universality of human physicality than do traditional Christologies. Here the anthropological implications of the formulae 'this is my body given to you,' 'this is my blood shed for you,' are drawn more radically than in many a theology of the Eucharist.